

NEWS

United States Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney, District of New Jersey
970 Broad Street, Seventh Floor
Newark, New Jersey 07102



Ralph J. Marra, Jr., Acting U.S. Attorney

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Contact:

Michael Drewniak, Public Affairs Officer
973-645-2888

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Eight Charged for Allegedly Trafficking Drugs Hidden in Luggage Handles; Cocaine Originated in West Indies

(More)

Public Affairs Office
Michael Drewniak, PAO

973-645-2888

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NEWARK – Eight people in the United States and abroad were indicted by a federal grand jury yesterday for their alleged participation in an international drug trafficking conspiracy, Acting U.S. Attorney Ralph J. Marra, Jr. announced.

The Superseding Indictment charges defendants in the United States, Great Britain and the West Indies, with conspiracy to smuggle cocaine in the handrails of luggage aboard commercial airlines from Jamaica and St. Lucia, into the United States, and ultimately to Great Britain.

According to the Superseding Indictment, drug couriers from the United States, such as Tajara Barnes and Genard Howard, would travel to Jamaica and St. Lucia, where defendants Roger Folkes and his brother Romeo Folkes and Mervin Francis would hide cocaine in the handrails of their luggage. The couriers would return to the United States carrying the cocaine-filled luggage where, the Superseding Indictment alleges, defendant Cortnie Spencer would take possession of the luggage containing the cocaine and deliver it to couriers who were scheduled to travel to Great Britain. The couriers would then fly to Great Britain where they would deliver the cocaine to defendants Nigel Roberts, Prine George Alfonso Jones, and others, in exchange for payment, the Superseding Indictment alleges.

Following are details on the custody status and location of each of the defendants:

- Nigel Roberts, 31, of Birmingham, England, was arrested on March 25 in Miami on an arrest warrant from the District of New Jersey. He is being returned to New Jersey for his initial appearance and arraignment, which has not yet been set.
- Prine George Alfonso Jones, 42, also of Birmingham, England, was arrested on Feb. 3 in Great Britain, for allegedly transporting narcotics directly from St. Lucia to Great Britain, where he is currently incarcerated. The United States intends to seek extradition.
- Cortnie Spencer, 32, of Queens, N.Y., was arrested on Sept. 8, after being arrested on the New Jersey Turnpike, allegedly in possession of suitcases he had picked up from a drug courier. The suitcase handrails contained approximately 800 grams of cocaine, according to a criminal Complaint.
- Roger Folkes, 37, of Jamaica, West Indies. The U.S. will seek extradition.
- Romeo Folkes, 26, of Jamaica. Same status as his brother, above.
- Mervin Francis, 33, also of Jamaica; also the same status as the Folkes brothers.

- Tajara Barnes, 33, and Genard Howard, 34, both of Brooklyn, N.Y., were first arrested on May 6, 2008 in London, for allegedly importing into that country approximately 1.7 kilos of cocaine. They were held in England until their deportation to the United States, where they were immediately arrested on Oct. 22 upon their return. They are both free on \$100,000 unsecured bond and ordered to remain in their homes with electronic monitoring.

Each defendant is charged with conspiracy to import and to export five kilos or more of cocaine, which carries a statutory mandatory minimum of 10 years in prison, a statutory maximum of life in prison, and fines of up to \$4 million. Spencer is also charged with possession of 500 grams or more of cocaine, which carries a statutory mandatory minimum of five years in prison, a statutory maximum of 40 years in prison, and a fine of up to \$2 million.

Despite the Superseding Indictment, the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

The Superseding Indictment results from a multi-jurisdictional and international investigation into this alleged narcotics trafficking ring. Marra credited Special Agents of the United States Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Peter G. Edge; and the Drug Enforcement Administration, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Gerard P. McAleer in Newark, in coordination with Police Officers with the West Midlands Police Complex Casework Unit in Birmingham, England and Officers of Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, Criminal Investigations, in Stains, England, for the investigation leading to the Indictment.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Eric W. Moran of the U.S. Attorney's Office Criminal Division in Newark.

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